

Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for separating an image signal into a set of image planes in accordance with a control signal, the method comprising the operations of:
 - (a) ~~sub-sampling, by a programmable amount, a rough foreground signal and a rough background signal while ignoring undefined pixels;~~
 - (b) ~~receiving~~ receiving the control signal and producing a threshold selector signal, via a selector module based on the control signal;
 - (c) ~~receiving~~ receiving the selector signal and producing a decision signal, via an edge processing ~~module;~~ and module;
 - (d) ~~receiving the sub-sampled foreground and background signals~~ receiving the image signal and the decision signal, and outputting a foreground an initial foreground signal and a background an initial background signal, via a foreground/background separation module, a representation of the current pixel of the image signal being included in at least one of the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal in accordance with the decision-signal. signal; and sub-sampling, by a programmable amount, the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal while ignoring undefined pixels.
2. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~Claim 1 wherein operation (c) further comprises:~~ Claim 1, further comprising:
 - ~~receiving the foreground signal and the background signal;~~

filling undefined pixels in the initial foreground and initial background signals with values computed so as to substantially prevent artifacts and to facilitate good compression ratio, using a cleanup module; and

outputting a final foreground signal and a final background signal.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~Claim 2~~Claim 2, wherein the operation of filling comprises:

extending content of defined pixels in each of the initial foreground and initial background signals to neighboring undefined pixels by filling neighboring undefined pixels with diluted foreground and background values, respectively, using a dilate module;

averaging non-zero content of the diluted foreground and background values over minimum coded unit blocks and outputting averaged block values, using a block average module; and

filling any remaining undefined pixels with the averaged block values, using a fill module.

4. (Currently Amended) A system for separating ~~the image~~an image signal into a set of image planes in accordance with a control signal, the system comprising:

~~a sub-sampling module sub-sampling, by a programmable amount, a rough foreground signal and a rough background signal and ignoring undefined pixels;~~

a selector module receiving the control signal and producing a threshold selector signal based on the control signal;

an edge processing module receiving the selector signal and producing a decision signal;

a foreground/background separation module receiving the ~~sub-sampled rough foreground and sub-sampled rough background signals~~image signal and the decision signal,

and outputting ~~a foreground~~ an initial foreground signal and ~~a background~~ an initial background signal, a representation of the current pixel of the image signal being included in at least one of the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal in accordance with the ~~decision-signal~~ signal; and

a sub-sampling module sub-sampling, by a programmable amount, the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal and ignoring undefined pixels.

5. (Currently Amended) The system of ~~Claim 4 wherein the separation module further comprises:~~ Claim 4, further comprising:

a cleanup module comprising the sub-sampling module, the cleanup module receiving the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal, filling undefined pixels in the initial foreground and initial background signals with values computed ~~so as to~~ substantially prevent compression ringing ~~artifacts~~ artifacts, and to facilitate good compression ~~ratio;~~ ratio and outputting a final foreground signal and a final background signal.

6. (Currently Amended) The system of ~~Claim 5~~ Claim 5, wherein the cleanup module further comprises:

a dilate module extending content of defined pixels in each of the initial foreground and initial background signals to neighboring undefined pixels by filling neighboring undefined pixels with diluted foreground and background values, respectively;

a block average module averaging non-zero content of the diluted foreground and background values over minimum coded unit blocks and outputting averaged block values; and

a fill module filling any remaining undefined pixels with the averaged block values.

7. (Currently Amended) An article of manufacture comprising:

a machine usable medium having program code embedded therein, the program code being used for separating an image signal into a set of image planes in accordance with a control signal, the program code comprising:

~~machine readable code to sub-sample, by a programmable amount, a rough foreground signal and a rough background signal while ignoring undefined pixels;~~

machine readable code to receive and process the control signal, and produce a threshold selector signal based on the control signal;

machine readable code to receive the selector signal and produce a ~~decision signal;~~ and signal;

machine readable code to receive and process the ~~sub-sampled rough foreground and background signals~~ image signal and the decision signal, and ~~outputs a foreground output an initial foreground signal and a background an initial background signal,~~ a representation of the current pixel of the image signal being included in at least one of the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal in accordance with the decision ~~signal.~~ signal; and

machine readable code to sub-sample, by a programmable amount, the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal while ignoring undefined pixels.

8. (Currently Amended) The article of manufacture of Claim 7 wherein the machine readable code further comprises:

machine readable code to receive the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal;

machine readable code to fill undefined pixels in the initial foreground and initial background signals with values computed so as to substantially prevent artifacts and to facilitate good compression ratio; and

a machine readable coded to output a final foreground signal and a final background signal.

9. (Currently Amended) The article of manufacture of ~~Claim 8~~Claim 8, wherein the machine readable code to fill undefined pixels comprises:

machine readable code to extend content of defined pixels in each of the initial foreground and initial background signals to neighboring undefined pixels by filling neighboring undefined pixels with diluted foreground and background values, respectively;

machine readable code to average non-zero content of the diluted foreground and background values over minimum coded unit blocks and to output averaged block values; and

machine readable code to fill any remaining undefined pixels with the averaged block values.

10. (Currently Amended) A system for separating an image signal into a set of image planes in accordance with a control signal, the system comprising:

~~(a) — means for sub-sampling, by a programmable amount, a rough foreground signal and a rough background signal and ignoring undefined pixels;~~

~~(b) — means~~means for receiving the control signal and producing a threshold selector signal, via a selector module based on the control signal;

~~(c) — means~~means for receiving the selector signal and producing a decision signal, via an edge processing module; and

~~(d) — means~~means for receiving the ~~sub-sampled rough foreground signal and sub-sampled rough background signal~~image signal and the decision signal, and outputting a ~~foreground~~an initial foreground signal and a ~~background~~an initial background signal, via a foreground/background separation module, a representation of the current pixel

of the image signal being included in at least one of the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal in accordance with the decision ~~signal~~; signal; and

means for sub-sampling, by a programmable amount, the initial foreground signal and the initial background signal and ignoring undefined pixels.

11. (Currently Amended) The system of ~~Claim 10 wherein the means (e) further comprises:~~Claim 10, further comprising:

~~means for receiving the foreground signal and the background signal;~~

means for filling undefined pixels in the initial foreground and initial background signals with values computed so as to substantially prevent artifacts and to facilitate good compression ratio, using a cleanup module; and

means for outputting a final foreground signal a final background signal.

12. (Currently Amended) The system of ~~Claim 11~~Claim 11, wherein the means for filling comprises:

means for extending content of defined pixels in each of the initial foreground and initial background signals to neighboring undefined pixels by filling neighboring undefined pixels with diluted foreground and background values, respectively, using a dilate module;

means for averaging non-zero content of the diluted foreground and background values over minimum coded unit blocks and outputting averaged block values, using a block average module; and

means for filling any remaining undefined pixels with the averaged block values, using a fill module.